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ABSTRACT

Data obtained in a 1983 survey of state legislative education committee chairpersons are summarized. The survey was conducted to discover if there were any trends acorss states in their recent efforts to improve education and to profile each state's educational policy activities. Survey findings include: (1) state efforts to improve schools began before 1983 and focused on proficiency testing; (2) the momentum of educational reform has shifted from testing to curriculum improvement; (3) in 1983 states began to place priority on selective subjects (math, science, computers); (4) states vary in their educational improvement efforts; (5) in 1983 education and taxes ranked as the leading state legislative budget issues; and (6) state policymakers frequently use blue ribbon education commissions to lay the groundwork for major policy reforms. Included is a list of 10 additional sources of information, footnotes, and a listing of the 36 states responding to the survey. (MD)

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES
EDUCATION PROGRAM
MEMORANDUM

November, 1983

Survey of 1983 State Efforts to Improve Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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EA 017 347

The information contained in this survey was collected and compiled with the assistance of Didi Massell, Administrative Assistant and Kileen Smythe, Education Intern, and under the guidance of William A. Harrison, Senior Program Director for Education.

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The National Conference of State Legislatures is the official representative of the country's 7,500 state legislators and their staffs. The Conference operates from a headquarters office in Denver, Colorado, and an office of State-Federal Relations in Washington, D.C.

For additional information about this survey, contact Peggy Siegel; Suite 203, 444 North Capitol Street, Washington, D.C. 20001; (202)737-7004.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO NCSL'S SURVEY ON RECENT STATE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

On July 11, 1983, the National Conference of State Legislatures mailed a three-page survey to the chairmen/women of house and senate education committees in all fifty states. Staff then followed up with telephone calls to states which had not responded by mid-August. As of mid-November, 1983, NCSL had received forty-five responses, representing thirty-six states.*

The purpose of the survey was two-fold. First, NCSL wished to discover if there were any **trends across states** in their recent efforts to improve education. Rather than seek detailed responses from each state at the outset, we asked the respondents to check selected items, indicating their state's own efforts to upgrade teaching and learning.

Second, NCSL wished to obtain a **profile of each state's activities** across a variety of educational policies. We wanted a reference point from which to gather more detailed information on selected state policies in the future.

The data, summarized here, illustrate recent state developments to improve education in two major areas, curriculum and teaching.

I. CURRICULUM

Prior to 1983, state efforts to improve curriculum standards had focused primarily on adopting student competency tests. Sixteen states in our survey had adopted competency exams to test the achievement levels of their students. Of this number, three states reported using the tests at high school graduation (New Mexico, New York and Vermont); five states used them periodically, prior to graduation (Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana and Maryland); and eight states tested students both before and at graduation (Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Utah.) Student competency tests are by no means passe, however. Five states in this survey adopted or updated such policies in 1983, either through law (Arizona and Arkansas) or by state board of education regulation (Idaho, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.)

In 1983, the most frequent legislative initiative to improve the curriculum has been in strengthening basic course requirements. Eleven states in the survey reported introducing legislation in 1983 to require additional coursework in math, English, a foreign language and/or computer literacy. Of these, five states enacted laws to tighten basic requirements (California, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota and Utah.)

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*The thirty-six states are listed at the end of this report.

State boards of education were even more active in this area. Sixteen state boards strengthened curriculum standards in 1983 (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, North Dakota, South Carolina, Washington and West Virginia.) Five states indicated that they had taken the same action prior to 1983 (New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Florida and Washington, the latter two states upgrading standards again during 1983.)

In tightening curriculum standards, Florida also limited the number of graduation credits that students could earn by taking certain courses, such as vocational education, home economics and remedial studies. Yet, no legislature in our survey actually deleted any "non-basic" courses in 1983. Bills have been introduced in two states (Illinois for driver's education and Massachusetts for physical education); however, only the North Dakota Board of Education actually struck down a non-basic requirement. Driver's education is no longer a prerequisite to high school graduation in North Dakota, but it is still a required course for all students under the age of sixteen.

During 1983, the **second most frequent legislative initiative** to improving the curriculum was extending the time that students spent in school. Eleven states reported introducing bills to lengthen the school day and/or school year. Of these, five states enacted such legislation, by either providing fiscal incentives to local districts (California); by offering it as a pilot project (North Carolina and Oklahoma) or by requiring it of all school districts (Arkansas and Florida.)

Fifteen states in the survey also raised their college entrance requirements in 1983. This action was undertaken primarily by each state's commission of higher education or by an individual college or university.

II. TEACHING

Mirroring their interest in student competency tests, a number of states also reported adopting teacher or administrator competency tests **prior to 1983.** Eleven states took this action, testing prospective teachers before college graduation (Colorado, North Carolina and Oklahoma); testing new teachers at the job entry level (Arizona, Louisiana and New York); testing at both levels (Florida, Kansas, California and South Carolina); or testing teachers at both the pre-graduation level and to grant promotions or tenure (Georgia). Teacher competency tests also retained their popularity in 1983, as four states adopted or strengthened such policies either by law (Arkansas and Colorado) or by state board of education regulation (Delaware and West Virginia.)

The most **frequent legislative initiative in 1983** to improve teaching was providing additional training or education for teachers in high demand areas, such as math, science and computer science.

By November 1, 1983, fifteen states in our survey reported introducing bills to supplement training in math, science or computers, with nine states enacting such legislation (Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, South Carolina and Washington.) This push for additional training in teacher shortage areas appears to be a fairly recent phenomenon, since no state in the survey had taken such action prior to 1983.

The **second most frequent legislative initiative** to improving teaching in 1983 was enacting policies to assist or dismiss inadequate teachers. Twelve legislatures in the survey reported introducing bills in this area, with five legislatures enacting such measures (Arizona, California, Maine and Montana and in Iowa, where the Governor vetoed it.)

Given all of the public attention surrounding the issue of merit pay, relatively few states in our survey had actually debated performance-based pay and/or career ladder opportunitites for teachers by November, 1983. Only six states in the survey reported introducing such measures. Of these, five states actually adopted some type of merit pay and/or master teacher plan (California, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina and Oklahoma.)

Six states also sought to improve the teaching profession by granting across-the-board state minimum teacher salary increases in 1983 (Arkansas, Maine, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio and Washington.) Two states combined both approaches: improving salaries, while differentiating among teachers according to their demonstrated competencies and/or responsibilities. North Carolina adopted an across-the-board pay raise and a master teacher plan, the latter on a pilot basis for one school district. California enacted a mentor teacher program and increased the state minimum salary schedule, but only at the entry level.

Several states also reported reexamining their teacher certification requirements. Three states had begun to require education majors to take additional courses in basic subjects prior to 1983 (Michigan, South Carolina and West Virginia) and two states took such action during 1983 (Florida and Montana.)

Allowing non-teachers to teach math and science was yet another teaching reform being considered in state capitols. Washington had embraced this policy prior to 1983. State boards of education in four states adopted such regulations during 1983 (Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina and West Virginia.) Bills to permit non-teachers inside the classroom were introduced in eight states in 1983 and enacted in two. Florida now allows certification for adjunct instructors in areas of critical teacher shortage and California will permit teacher trainees, college graduates who are non-education majors, inside the classroom under the supervision of a mentor teacher.

In summary, as evidenced by the results of this survey, states may differ in their approaches to curing what ails education. Yet

the push toward excellence is clearly a nationwide movement which began in the early eighties, gathered momentum in 1983 and will most certainly burst forth onto legislative agendas in 1984.

WHAT THE POUNDING HOOFPRINTS TELL US: SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE STAMPEDE TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Even a quick-and-dirty survey, such as this one, reveals a number of important points about 1983's stampede toward educational excellence.

First, state efforts to improve the schools really began before 1983, as numbers of legislatures and state boards of education embraced competency testing for both students and teachers. Early efforts focused not on rethinking the curriculum, but on demonstrating proficiency in whatever it was that kids were expected to learn and teachers were expected to teach.

Second, the momentum of educational reform appears to have shifted away from testing and toward buttressing curricular standards. By 1983, states began questioning the contents of the coursework itself. Many have added courses in so-called basic subjects and have required additional credits for high school graduation. California and Florida--two of six states in this country which previously had no statewide requirements for high school graduation /1--did a complete about-face and enacted rigorous curricular standards in 1983.

Recent state efforts, such as these, are also reversing the decade-long slide away from the basics in favor of a more diversified curriculum, where students could, for example, elect to take courses in driver's education and training for marriage and adulthood. /2 Sometimes these efforts to round out the curriculum took on creative dimensions. A Wisconsin law required teaching "the value of dairy products," /3 while California, Michigan and Texas until recently, mandated teaching "kindness to animals." Yet, despite recent criticism over cluttering up the curriculum, states have not moved nearly as aggressively in removing such courses as they have in adding more basics. The crunch is likely to come when legislatures confront the costs--in time and money--of adding to the school day and/or school year.

Third, in 1983 states became more willing to entertain debate on the merits of differential treatment of courses and teachers. States began to place priority on selective subjects--math, science, computers--and on those individuals who could teach them. Relatively few states actually adopted merit pay or master teacher proposals in 1983. But this finding may reflect more on the timing of our survey than on any lack of interest in the issue. Performance-based pay, career ladders and the like will likely

receive their due as many legislatures, now in recess, resume their sessions in 1984.

Fourth, states are not pursuing a single path toward educational excellence. If anything, this survey reaffirms state assertions that they vary greatly in their approaches to improving teaching and learning. Some states mounted an all-out frontal attack on school problems in 1983. Other states targeted their efforts more narrowly, and still others seem on the verge of enacting major educational reforms in the near future. Therefore, despite the commonality across educational issues--"Johnny/Janey Can't Compose"; "Teacher Can't Compute"; "School Can't Compete"--each state is likely to deal with these issues in its own, unique and often unpredictable way.

Fifth, "What price excellence?" will continue to weigh heavily on the minds of legislators as they address the financial end of things. In surveying the legislative fiscal officers of all fifty states earlier this year, NCSL found that tax increases played a larger role in budget adjustments during 1983 than at any time in over a decade. Taxes and K-12 education ranked one-two as the leading state budget issues during 1983. Attention to school finance represents a dramatic shift from just a year ago, when less than one-fourth as many states mentioned funding local government--including the schools--as a top budget issue. 4/

Paying the price of excellence was also a concern reflected in this education survey. Twelve of the responding 36 states indicated that they had increased appropriations or enacted new taxes to fund education during 1983. Six more states anticipated a funding increase and/or tax hike for education during the 1984 legislative session. Thirteen other states did not envision a funding or tax increase in 1983-84, with several respondents volunteering the information: "not during an election year."

Yet state policymakers may find some welcome reassurance in the November 1983 defeat of two anti-tax initiatives in Ohio and by fairly hefty margins. Almost 56 per cent of the voters turned back a proposed constitutional amendment to repeal the 90 per cent income tax increase/reform package enacted by the Legislature earlier this year. And almost 60 per cent of the voters rejected another ballot issue which would have required a 3/5ths majority vote in both chambers for any future tax hikes. Ohio residents had told pollsters last spring that they were more concerned about education and jobs than taxes. 5/ The willingness of these voters to match their vocal cords with their wallets should encourage state elected officials to address the money issues head on.

Sixth, state policymakers will frequently utilize the services of a blue ribbon commission to lay the groundwork for subsequent major policy reforms. Given the number of special commissions at work in 1982 and 1983, all signs are go that the rate of adopting excellence intiatives will accelerate in 1984. The Education Commission of the States identified the existence of 130 state task

forces or commissions looking at the problem of the schools since early 1982. /6 ECS reported one or more of these groups at work in forty-eight states. A sizable majority of states in our survey (27) reported having one or more special task forces currently developing state plans to improve education. And state legislators will most certainly be involved in formulating recommendations for change, as 23 of these 27 states reported legislative members on their task forces or commissions.

By now, as these survey findings indicate, educational excellence has assumed a multi-faceted identity and a stamina of its own. It took root in states during the early eighties. And it was treated to a national consciousness-raising in 1983: hence the stampede toward excellence. But once the dust clears, there should be enough to keep us all busy for a long, long time.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND UPCOMING STUDIES ON STATE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION:

1. Education Commission of the States, **50-State Survey of Initiatives in Science, Mathematics and Computer Education**, written by Jane Armstrong, September, 1983.

-Includes state-by-state descriptions of state actions taken between 1982 and September, 1983 to improve mathematics, science or computer education for grades K-12, including:

1) creating task forces or commissions;
2) strengthening high school graduation requirements;
3) strengthening curricular guidelines and performance standards;
4) providing new science, math and computer education programs;
5) creating summer institutes, magnet and residential schools;
6) establishing regional centers to provide school districts with multi-resources in math, science, computers and technology;
7) recognizing and awarding outstanding students, teachers, programs or schools;
8) instituting scholarships, loans or in-service programs to train and re-train teachers.

-An appendix contains the names of state contact people in all fifty states, their addresses and telephone numbers.

For additional information: Contact ECS, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295; (303)830-3600.

2. Education Commission of the States, **State Programs of School Improvement, 1983: A 50-State Survey**, written by Van Dougherty, October,1983.

-Updates a 1982 ECS 50-state survey of school improvement activities.

-Presents state profiles of recent efforts to improve education in the following areas:

1) state-developed curriculum or curricular guidelines;
2) school accreditation standards;
3) comprehensive school improvement initiatives, including "effective schools" programs;
4) technical assistance efforts;
5) student competency tests;
6) teacher/administrator improvement efforts;
7) math, science and technology initiatives.

For additional information: Contact ECS, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295; (303)830-3600.

3. Education Commission of the States, **Survey of States' Teacher Policies**, written by Patricia Flakus-Mosqueda, October, 1983.

-Presents eleven descriptive tables which, together, outline each state's current efforts and practices in the areas of teacher preparation and training; certification; advanced preparation; in-service opportunities for teachers and administrators; and incentives to attract and retain good teachers.

-Provides state-by-state information about teacher shortages and projected student enrollments.

For additional information: Contact ECS, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295; (303)830-3600.

4. Governor's Ad Hoc Committee, Education Commission of the States, **Pocket Guide to Rewarding Teachers for Performance**, November, 1983.

-Includes a description of key policy issues surrounding the question of paying teachers more for doing a superior job.

-Summarizes the activities of the states in considering new teacher compensation plans (as of September 10, 1983).

-Lists the names of experts on teacher compensation plans--from the ranks of research, state and local adminstrators, and teacher organizations.

For additional information, contact Bob Palaich, Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295; (303)830-3600.

5. Education Week, **Mathematics and Science Education: Problems and Prospects**, July 27, 1983 (a special report)

-Addresses a variety of the excellence issues involving future technological and educational demands; equal access to education; teaching and teachers; the curriculum; private schools; and colleges.

-Includes a regional profile, with state-by-state descriptions, of recent efforts to improve education.

For additional information, contact: Education Week, #560, 1333 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; (202)466-5190.

6. National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology, **Educating Americans for the 21st Century**, September, 1983.

-Recommends a plan of action to upgrade America's elementary and secondary schools in math, science and technology so that the United States will achieve "world educational leadership" by 1995.

-An Appendix includes a representative listing of programs and activities reviewed by the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology. Includes a descriptive paragraph of programs supported by the federal government; state governments; local governments and school districts; institutions of higher education; professional associations; business and industry; museums, science academies and other informal education programs; and multiple collaborations among the different sectors.

For additional information: Contact the office of the Commission on Mathematics, Science and Technological Education, The National Science Foundation, 1800 G Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20550; (202) 357-7700.

7. Report to the Secretary of Education from the staff of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, **Meeting the Challenge: Recent Efforts to Improve Education Across the Nation**, December 1983.

-Updates efforts to improve education across the country since the release of **A Nation at Risk.**

-Includes short descriptions of educational reform initiatives in each state; examples of local district efforts; and the activities of national organizations and associations.

For additional information, contact: Susan Traiman, National

Commission on Excellence in Education, Room 222, 1200 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208; (202)254-7920.

8. Southern Regional Education Board, **Meeting the Need for Quality: Action in the South**, September, 1983.

-Assesses the response of 14 southern states to the 25-point program for educational improvement adopted by the SREB Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools in its 1981 report, **The Need for Quality.**

-Includes tables on the following topics:

1) new requirements for high school graduation and college admissions;
2) student testing in grades 9 - 12;
3) teacher testing at admission to college, before certification and to assess performance.

-Includes descriptions of the master teacher/merit pay proposals in Tennessee; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; and Florida.

For additional information: Contact the SREB, Margaret Sullivan, 1340 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30309; (404)875-9211.

9. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

-WICHE is currently surveying the Western states on their **teacher education programs** for elementary, secondary and special education teachers. Data will include information on:

1) recent studies on the quality, supply and preparation of teachers;
2) shifts in enrollments;
3) changes in general admission, retention and graduation requirements;
4) efforts to increase the output of math and science teachers;
5) collaborative arrangements among schools, state departments of education and colleges of education.

For additional information: Contact Erica J. Gusman, WICHE, PO Drawer P, Boulder, Colorado 80302; (303)497-0200.

10. New projects funded by the **Secretary of Education's Discretionary Fund**, November, 1983.

-U.S. Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell has awarded $2.5 million in federal grants to 33 state and local projects intended to implement various recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Several of the awards were granted to associations which represent state-level policymakers. These

include:

1) Council of Chief State School Officers. Support for creation of a computer database on educational excellence to collect and dissmeninate information on all state-level activities relating to the National Commission on Excellence in Education.

   For additional information: Contact Pat Martin, CCSSO, Suite 379, 444 N. Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001; (202)393-8169.

2) Education Commission of the States. Support for a national study panel to identify the key elements considered by state and local policymakers in adopting a merit pay plan.

   For additional information: Contact Bob Palaich, ECS, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295; (303)830-3600.

3) National Association of State Boards of Education. Support to develop and disseminate information relating to teacher incentives and educational standards.

   For additional information: Contact Lana Muraskin, NASBE, 701 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 340, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; (703)684-4000.

For information on the thirty other grant recipients, contact Mary Jean Letendre, Special Assistant to the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20202; (202)426-6420.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ernest Boyer, **High School**, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Harper and Row: New York). p. 72

2. See Boyer, Chapters 4 and 5.

3. Boyer, p. 76.

4. National Conference of State Legislatures, Steven Gold and Karen M. Benker, **State Budget Actions for 1983**, September 1, 1983.

5. Peggy Caldwell, **Ohioans Defeat Effort to Repeal Tax Increases**, Education Week, 11/16/83.

6. Education Commission of the States, **State Education Review**, Vol. 1, Number 10, October 1983.

THE THIRTY-SIX STATES RESPONDING TO NCSL'S SURVEY ON RECENT STATE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

Arizona
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Kansas
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
New Hampshire
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
South Dakota
Utah
Vermont
Washington
West Virginia